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105. Note on Bantu Star-Names

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ORIGINAL ARTICLES.

Pacific, Eastern.

With Plate M.

Partington.

Ceremonial Objects from Rarotonga. By J. Edge-Partington.

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The British Museum has recently acquired two very interesting specimens from Rarotonga, in the Eastern Pacific. The carving of the small figures, with their pointed oval eyes, is typical of Rarotonga. Both pieces are evidently of considerable age.

No. 1 of Plate M is a staff of hard wood, oval in section, both sides being alike; the human figures are carved back to back, there being three pairs on each half, the double pair in the middle is represented feet to feet, and the rest correspond in position to them. The intervening spaces are neatly wrapped with sinnet, the two outer ones in a rectangular pattern, and the two inner ones with ordinary wrapping. There can be little doubt, I think, that this staff was put to some religious or ceremonial use, being probably an idol.

No. 2. The appearance is axe-shaped, and the whole surface is deeply grooved in a herring-bone pattern, both sides being similarly treated. The butt-end is carved with the little figures feet to feet, and is pierced with three holes for a wrist cord. From the two holes pierced at the lower end, it is evident that this object was used at dances, and probably had a plume of feathers attached.

J. EDGE-PARTINGTON.

Africa, East.

Werner.

Note on Bantu Star-Names. By Miss A. Werner.

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My impression, so far, has been that nearly, if not quite all, the people with whom I have been brought in contact have lost much of the star knowledge which they once possessed. This is shown (i) by the small number of stars known by name; (ii) by the same name being applied to different stars or groups of stars.

Some Nyasaland names were collected by Captain Stigand and appear in his paper published in the *Journal* of the Royal Anthropological Society, and there is much valuable information in a paper communicated some years ago to the South African Association for the Advancement of Science by the Rev. Father Norton. This is full of interest, and throws light on some points previously obscure. Neither of their papers is now within reach; but I think that Captain Stigand gives more additional names beyond those I was able to obtain in Nyasaland; also (if I can trust my memory) that the names for the same star were sometimes, but not always, the same in both lists. The stars for which I have heard names are:—

(1) THE PLEIADES.—These are the most widely known, from their association with agriculture. The name, I think (I cannot just now recall it for any of the Congo languages) is always derived from the “applied” form of the verb *lima* = “cultivate.” Thus: Zulu *isi-limela*, Swahili *Ki-limia*, Giriyama *kirimira*, &c. In Yao and in Pokomo, the plural is used: *i-rimira** (from *chi-limila*) and *vimia* (pl. of *Kimia*) respectively. In connection with this fact it may be noticed (1) that my Yao informant gave me the name as that of the three stars in Orion’s belt; (2) that the Pokomo seem to apply the name to two different groups of stars, known as “male” and “female” *vimia* (*vimia viume* and *vimia vike* respectively), but I have not yet been able to ascertain what the second is. The Rev. W. E. Taylor, in his valuable *Giriyama Vocabulary and Collections*, has the following note (*s.v.* “Pleiades,” p. 73): “The two stars to the east of the Pleiades, *uniwula*.” This, like some other astronomical references in the same work, is unfortunately vague. Possibly the stars meant are the Hyades, or, if “east” is to be taken strictly, β and Tauri. I hope

* So heard at Blantyre. The l and r sounds are interchangeable in Yao.

to settle this point later on. The word *uniwula* is evidently connected with *vula* (*wula*) = "rain," which suggests the Hyades. I would hardly venture to make this suggestion but that Taurus is above the horizon during the time of the "lesser rains" (*vuli*) in October and November and also during the beginning of the *Mwaka* rains (usually in March). The Swahili proverb "Kilimia kikizama kwa jua huzuka kwa mvua, kikizama kwa jua huzuka kwa jua" (Taylor, *African Aphorisms*, section 150: "When the Pleiades set in sun they rise in rain," and *vice versâ*) has certainly been fulfilled this year, when there were heavy showers at the beginning of November; but May has been exceptionally dry. (Mr. Taylor's comment, "Taurus, in the Southern Hemisphere, rises in May and sets in November," is—at any rate as regards this latitude—surely a mistake.) I have the name *Machinga usiku* noted for the Pleiades in Nyasaland. It might mean "fence" or "rampant of the night," but I am not sure that it really belongs to them.

(ii) ORION'S BELT.—These three stars seem everywhere to have been noticed and are often known by some name connected with *hunting*. On the Lower Congo they are known as "the Leopard, the Dog, and the Hunter," which names are embodied in a little song quoted in Bentley's *Kongo Dictionary*, *s.v.*

On the Lower Shire (and I think elsewhere, but have no definite note on the subject), it is *Mauta*, "the Bows"—or rather "the Bow and Arrows," for I think the plural has this collective force. At Mombasa, and apparently also at Zanzibar, they are called *Tamaa* (طمع) *na Mwanadamu na Mauti* (موت)—the names, as well as the explanation (*viz.*, that, as the son of Adam follows after Desire, so Death in turn follows him) being obviously Arabic). *Dzangwe* is another name for these stars in Nyasaland, of which I can give no explanation; it is sometimes said to mean the Pleiades and may be given to any bright group of stars. In "Chisochiri" (a language at the north end of Lake Nyasa of whose identity I am uncertain) they are called *Ahadzera*. I should be glad of some further light on this name. The Giryama name is *Kifunguchore* (given by Rebmann* as *Kifungudzore*, "the name of a constellation"), of which I am unable as yet to explain the meaning.

(iii) THE PLANET VENUS.—Usually associated with the Moon as "his wife." In Barnes' *Nyanja Vocabulary*, *s.v.* Mwezi, will be found the myth (as told at Likoma) of the moon's two wives, Chekechani and Puikani, which (supposing the morning and evening star to be two separate bodies) connects them with the waxing and waning of the moon. This story, without the names and in less detail, I have also heard at Blantyre. It seems to have a fairly wide range. In Giryama the name *Mukazamwezi*, "the moon's wife," is used. Taylor says (*Voc.*, p. 97), if a "planet seen near the moon." It does not seem to be known in Pokomo.

In Nyasaland the name *Ntanda* (*Mtanda*?) is used, which means "the central" "post of the hut," and perhaps suggests the idea of a fixed point round which the other stars revolve. But this suits Jupiter rather than Venus, and I noticed, more than once in Nyasaland, that names seemed to be attributed to any bright star indiscriminately. Most of my information comes from children, who would be quite likely to make mistakes; but a note from Livingstone (probably *Zambesi Expedition*, first edition, p. 176) shows that I am not alone in this error. The names there given for Venus are *Ntanda* and *Manjika*—concerning the latter I have no other information.

The Yao name for Venus is *Tekuteku* and the Chisochiri *Bwivi*. I should be glad of any information tending to throw light on these. I have heard of no Swahili names for this planet, except the Arabic *Zohara*. In fact, my teacher at Mombasa disclaimed all knowledge of the stars on his own account, apparently thinking there

* *Nika Dictionary*, p. 164. *Dzore* is evidently plural of *chore*. The word (which is not in Taylor) was given to me by a Giryama at Kaloleni.

was something unholy about it; it was *kazi ya waganga* he said. Taylor gives *ndata* ("a walking stick") as a Giryama name for the "evening star and morning star")*—which, perhaps, refers not to Venus but to Jupiter, as being, to quote Father Norton from memory, "the peg or pin on which the night hangs." (If I am not mistaken this is the name given by the Basuto to Jupiter.) One native informant, however, says that *ndata* is the same as *mkazamwezi* and I have failed, as yet, to get any explanation of the name. My Pokomo informant tells me of a *nyoha ya magura* "morning star," but as it evidently cannot be Venus, it will be better to place this under the next heading.

I may add here the Zulu name for the morning star, *u(lu)-kwezi*, evidently from *kweza*, causative of *kwela*, "to ascend"—the one who "brings up" the dawn, as though drawing it after her from below the horizon. Livingstone (*loc. cit.*) gives *kuewa usiku* = "drawer of night," as the Nyanja name for Sirius; but this may be a mistake.†

IV. JUPITER.—This planet seems to have attracted attention everywhere owing to its brilliancy and its variable position in relation to other stars. The Chinyanja name is *ng'andu*, and the "Chisochiri" *Cheze*, of which I have no explanation. It is, I suspect, the star called by the Pokomo *nyoha ya magura*, of which my informant says that hunting expeditions are regulated by it; the old men (without whose permission the hunters cannot start) watch this star night after night, till they find that it is overhead just before dawn. This is considered to be the propitious time. The fact of its being overhead at this time (*ingana na kits wa*) seems decisive against its being Venus.

Father Norton, if I remember rightly, gives as the Suto name for Jupiter a word meaning, as already stated, the "peg" or "pin" of the night—probably with the idea that, being a conspicuous and, as it were, a central object in the sky, it draws the night up after it as it ascends.

I have only once found the constellation Ursa Major recognised, and that not as a whole. My house-boy, a Zanzibar Swahili, tells me that the three stars (ϵ , ζ , η), usually known as the "horses" of Charles's Wain, are called *Homankuhome*, which he explains as "*pigankupige*" = "Hit (him) and I'll hit you"—the third being supposed thus to address the second, who is pursuing the first. This verb *ku homa* is not either in Knapf's *Swahili Dictionary* or Steere's *Handbook*.

He also pointed out a star—Sirius, if I am not mistaken—which he called *Nyota jaa*, and said that people found their way by it if lost at night. Probably the name is equivalent to "the north star," as Steere gives *Shika majira ya jaa* = "steer " northwards."

The Giryama word for "star" is the same as that used in Chinyanja, *nyenyezi*. In Swahili and several neighbouring languages the word is *nyota*, which Meinhof takes to be an original Bantu root, *tota*. In Yao the word is *ndondwa*, which seems to be identical with Maka *etotwa*. In Pokomo it is interesting to find that *nyenyezi* means the fixed stars, "those that keep on winking" and "follow the whole " sky" (*Hufuata mbingu yote*), i.e., move round in a body and not independently; while *nyoha* (= *nyota*) are the planets. Probably the distinction exists in other languages, but has not been noticed. I find in one dialect of Makuan *etendezi*, which may be the same word as *nyenyezi*.

* I am told that is the name of the three-sided club used by the Giryama for killing snakes, which is not, strictly speaking, a walking-stick. But a variety of forms appear to be in use, some of which serve both purposes.

† Possibly the name *mpika-tsiku* (*tsiku* = day), which I have noted from Nyasaland has the same meaning, though I cannot recall to what star it was applied. The usual meaning of *pika* is "to cook," but it may have others.

Judging from Father Norton's paper the Basuto would seem to know more about the stars—or pay more attention to them—than many other Bantu. Was this due to contact with the Bushmen, who were well versed in star-lore?

The Zulus, I believe, have a good many star-names, but, at a distance from books or informants regarding that language, I am compelled to leave them out of account.

A. WERNER.

Archæology.

Smith.

Flint Flakes of Tertiary and Secondary Age. By Worthington
G. Smith.

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Naturally-formed flint flakes with bulbs and conchoidal curves are not uncommonly found in post-Pliocene Boulder-Clay, but the clear demonstration of the natural production of bulbed and faceted flakes in the very much older lower Eocene sands (Thanétien) of Belle Assize, Clermont (Oise) by the Abbé Breuil* is most instructive. The separate flakes and cores would

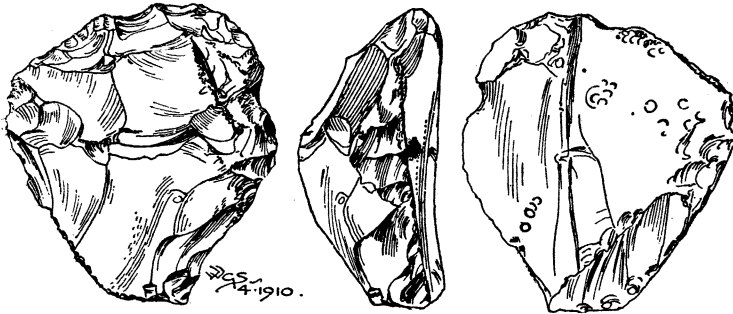


FIG. 1.—NATURAL SCRAPER-LIKE FLINT OF TERTIARY AGE. (ACTUAL SIZE.)

have possessed much less value had they been merely found distributed in Eocene sand, but examples were met with lying opposed to the mother block of flint from which they had become naturally detached.

In connection with naturally-formed pseudo-implements of Tertiary age the two following cases support the facts published by the Abbé Breuil. The scraper-like unabraded example, illustrated actual size in Fig. 1, was found by me *in situ* in the Lower Tertiary deposit which covers the chalk of Dunstable Downs. The deposit includes black flint pebbles, irregular blocks of flint, Hertfordshire conglomerate, sand, greywethers, ironstone, and other materials, accompanied by a ferruginous clay.

The flint illustrated, with its numerous artificial-looking facets and its naturally trimmed edge owes its origin entirely to the pressure of small Eocene pebbles. The face of the stone illustrated on the right clearly shows the effect of the squeezing of pebbles against it. The example is black and new looking, but it is really very old, as is proved by the ferruginous concretions on its facets, derived from ironstone and ferruginous clay.

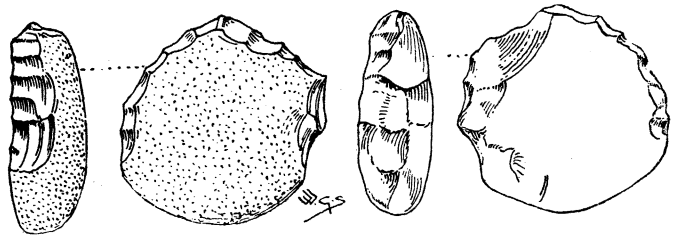


FIG. 2.—NATURAL SCRAPER-LIKE FLINT OF TERTIARY AGE. (ACTUAL SIZE.)

The second example (Fig. 2 illustrates actual size) is part of a Lower Tertiary pebble of scraper-like appearance, found and sent to me by a friend, together with other broken flint fragments from Knock Mill, Kingsdown, not far from the Portobello

* *Anthropologie*, 1910, xxi; W. J. Sollas, *Ancient Hunters*, pp. 68, 69.